



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Dwane Roth Receives Kansas Leopold Conservation Award**

Dwane Roth of Holcomb has been selected as the recipient of the 2021 Kansas Leopold Conservation Award®.

Given in honor of renowned conservationist Aldo Leopold, the award recognizes farmers, ranchers and forestland owners who inspire others with their dedication to land, water and wildlife resources in their care.

In Kansas the award is presented annually by Sand County Foundation and national sponsor American Farmland Trust, with state partners: Kansas Association of Conservation Districts (KACD) and the Ranchland Trust of Kansas (RTK).

Roth is a grain farmer with a strong interest in water conservation and irrigation technology. He was announced as the recipient of the award at the Kansas Association of Conservation Districts' 77th Annual Convention in Wichita, and receives \$10,000 and a crystal award for being selected.

"Dwane's passion and excitement for conserving groundwater, without sacrificing economic returns in one of the most productive agricultural regions of the world, is inspiring and should foster hope to future generations of irrigated farm families," said Mike Beam, Kansas Secretary of Agriculture.

"Dwane is passionate in his quest to promote water conservation and reduce the decline of the Ogallala aquifer. Using new technologies and innovative ideas, he has demonstrated on his own farm that reducing irrigation is possible without negatively affecting the economic bottom line," said Dan Meyerhoff, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts Executive Director. "Dwane recently shared with me 'I've only just begun.' He exemplifies the extraordinary commitment celebrated by the Leopold Conservation Award."

"Dwane is a lifelong learner and also a teacher. His land ethic, desire to conserve water, and expertise in irrigation technology make him a great representation of this award. Congratulations to Dwane Roth and his family," said Chelsea Good, Ranchland Trust of Kansas Chair of the Board.



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“Recipients of this award are real life examples of conservation-minded agriculture,” said Kevin McAleese, Sand County Foundation President and Chief Executive Officer. “These hard-working families are essential to our environment, food system and rural economy.”

“As the national sponsor for Sand County Foundation’s Leopold Conservation Award, American Farmland Trust celebrates the hard work and dedication of the Kansas recipient,” said John Piotti, AFT President and CEO. “At AFT we believe that conservation in agriculture requires a focus on the land, the practices and the people and this award recognizes the integral role of all three.”

Earlier this year, Kansas landowners were encouraged to apply (or be nominated) for the award. Applications were reviewed by an independent panel of agricultural and conservation leaders. Among the many outstanding Kansas landowners nominated for the award were finalists: Vance and Louise Ehmke of Healy, Ray and Susan Flickner of Witchita, and Glenn and Barbara Walker of Brookville.

In 2015 the first Kansas Leopold Conservation Award was presented to Sproul Ranch of Sedan. Last year’s recipient was Flying W Ranch (Josh and Gwen Hoy) of Cedar Point.

The Leopold Conservation Award in Kansas is made possible thanks to the generous support of American Farmland Trust, Kansas Association of Conservation Districts, Ranchland Trust of Kansas, Sand County Foundation, Farm Credit Associations of Kansas, ITC Great Plains, Evergy, Kansas Department of Agriculture (Division of Conservation), Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks, Kansas Forest Service, McDonald’s, The Nature Conservancy, USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and a Kansas Leopold Conservation Award recipient.

In his influential 1949 book, *A Sand County Almanac*, Leopold called for an ethical relationship between people and the land they own and manage, which he called “an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity.”

Sand County Foundation presents the Leopold Conservation Award to private landowners in 23 states for extraordinary achievement in voluntary conservation. For more information, visit [www.leopoldconservationaward.org](http://www.leopoldconservationaward.org).

#### ABOUT DWANE ROTH

Grow crops with less water. That challenge spurred an ever-expanding land ethic in Dwane Roth.

Dwane knew of the declining water level in the Ogallala aquifer he farms above. He felt he was already doing his part by increasing crop yields with reduced equipment and labor costs. Then a cropland landlord challenged him to look into irrigation technology.



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Despite droughts and sandy soils prone to wind erosion, he quickly met the challenge and became a sought-after expert on the role of soil moisture management technology's role in water conservation.

As one of Kansas' first "Water Technology Farms" he began demonstrating emerging irrigation technologies, cropping patterns, and management techniques in 2016. Energy-efficient bubblers, probes, cameras and drones delivered irrigation, measured soil moisture, and enabled seamless data collection. Dwane acquired an insatiable appetite for information that showed how innovation could extend the aquifer's lifetime while improving his soil's health.

Dwane soon volunteered more of his 6,000 acres of farmland for the project. Testing irrigation technologies would ultimately lead to adoption by other farmers, but he wasn't willing to wait. He spearheaded an effort that resulted in other area farmers saving more than 35,000 acre-feet of water per year.

With a knack for getting others to see themselves as a community of water users, he organized a summit in 2019 of food supply chain interests in Finney County. With a goal of making the county a model of sustainability in food production, his leadership sustained the effort through 2020's shutdown.

Dwane serves as a technology farm advisor to universities, state agencies and Syngenta. He also works to identify ways to streamline conservation cost-share programs and simplify decision-making processes for farmers. He regularly attends GreenBiz events that bring together companies, cities and industries to drive technology and sustainability initiatives. It's there where corporate leaders value hearing directly from this innovative fourth-generation Kansas farmer.

Dwane and wife Kim have three daughters. His land ethic has rubbed off on their daughter Grace. Her FFA project began the Kansas Youth Water Advocates Program, which teaches high school students to appreciate and advocate for local water resources.

Dwane is aware that water availability is not the only challenge facing Kansas agriculture. Poor water quality from increasing salinity and heavy metals harms soil and crops. High density cropping with limited crop diversity impacts the region's wildlife. In response, he's seeking other ways to improve the entire ecological community.

He has utilized the Conservation Reserve Program to plant native grasses on more than 100 acres of field corners to improve wildlife habitat. Dwane is experimenting to determine which cover crops provide cattle feed while improving soil health and erosion control in his region. His farming practices have also caught the interest of companies whose mission is reversing climate change.



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More than three decades into his farming career, Dwane has begun transitioning ownership of some of his farmland to his nephews. The greatest motivation of this tireless agricultural conservation proponent is making sure the next generation has a chance to grow food while improving the landscape.

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